

Fingard supports changes to SSHRC

by Ryan Stanley

Doctoral students in the humanities need not be alarmed by changes in the process of vetting their federal research grant applications, says Dalhousie's Dean of Graduate Studies.

In fact, Judith Fingard says the recent overhaul of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) structure was necessary, and one that "students should feel comfortable about."

SSHRC is the national granting institution, funded by the Canadian government, which supports doctoral and postdoctoral study in the social sciences and humanities. Doctoral students and professors apply to SSHRC when seeking financial backing for their research.

Under the old system, students had their applications ranked by faculty committees in their departments. These applications were then sent, along with the students' transcripts and letters of recommendation, to SSHRC in Ottawa. Once there, they were

reviewed by roughly fifteen committees representing academics from different disciplines across Canada, says Fingard.

However, she says, "there's been a crisis in the central SSHRC office. They simply can't find enough faculty to serve on those committees."

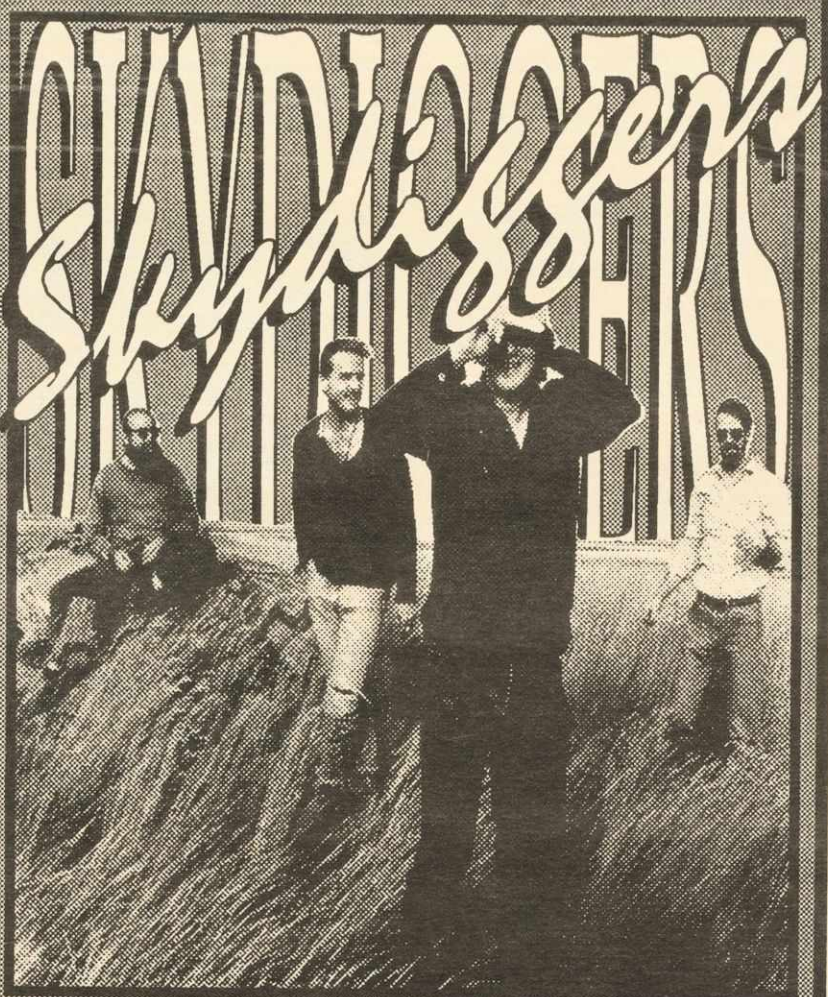
As a result, she says, "SSHRC is trying to deploy faculty resources more sensibly." A new process, adopted over the summer, introduces an additional tier to the SSHRC structure. A five-member Selection Committee, composed of Dalhousie professors from a range of academic fields, will assess all applications for SSHRC funding coming from Dalhousie departments. Of these, the committee will choose 22 to be sent on to Ottawa, where the number of SSHRC committees has been reduced to about five. Dalhousie's quota of 22 applications was fixed by SSHRC.

Fingard points out that this figure is quite generous. The traditional rate of approval for SSHRC applications is

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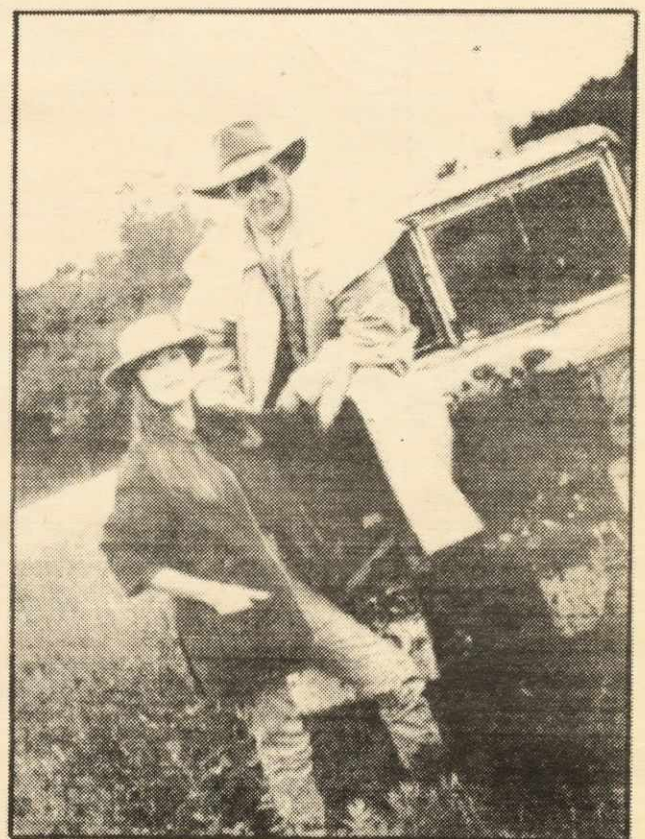

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